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Empathy among the members of isolated culture

This article presents a look at the resocialization, as a cultural offer, which were presented for imprisoned persons. Perceiving the phenomenon of the prison subculture, as a threat to the future readaptation, a program with using elements of drama was suggested and presented whether and what scope he can contribute to the increase in the level of empathy in.

Key words: prison subculture, empathy.

Justification of the problem in literature

Imprisonment has four functions: retaliatory, eliminatory, deterrent and corrective [3], of which the last one is now the most accented. As a result, prisons are implementing the rules of penitentiary rehabilitation, consisting of characterological habit changes – eliminating negative, asocial and anti-social attitudes inducing individuals to asocial and anti-social behaviour. This is done by passing certain knowledge and pointing to new styles of social behaviour. Due to the place of the educational process and its recipients, it is extremely difficult [11, p.17]. The dominant view among some authors is that penal rehabilitation is a cultural offer for persons deprived of their liberty. It involves specific eradication and restructuring of faulty values, attitudes and ways of behaviour of individuals [7, p.103-104]. In the creative rehabilitation concept by M. Konopczyński one can find references to the regeneration of their identity and recovering the face. Instead of psycho-correction, an individual internalises constructive principles and thus assumes new "identity costumes" [9].

According to B. Suchodolski, an issue of concern to ethnopedagogy is searching for "diversity in unity" and "unity in diversity", which can be understood as not destroying diversity and stimulating it in the direction of maintaining the unity [8]. This way of looking at the world would enable pretending to become an open society. Diversity in prison should be considered as based on the phenomenon of prison subculture. According to S. Przybyliński it can be considered as an informal, social stratification of the convicted. It is a hidden trend in prison, which has a destructive influence on the process of rehabilitation. Its enforced guidelines - "prison code" - are available only for the initiated and are located frontally to the process of inmate correction. "The second life" in prison, through its specificity, is an important problem for the rehabilitation processes [13, p.9]. For this reason, its significance should not be negated. Participation in the prison subculture is tantamount to the adoption of the deviant status – the criminal. Prison subculture phenomenon can even be treated as a system, and its main components are: specific hierarchy of values and the associated system of standards of behaviour which are accompanied by "quasi-magical" way of thinking, a kind of lifestyle and habits, and the products of prison subculture (dialect, tattoos, songs, poetry, etc.) [13, p.21]. The prison subculture, as an integral part of the prison, disrupts proper rehabilitation process control and psychocorrection, highlighting the process of "prisonisation", which is just superficial adjustment to prison conditions, equivalent to cursorily accepting interactions and resulting procedures. Prisoners adjust to life in isolation, in order to live optimally and somehow cope. Their superficial adapting to the prison conditions subsequently hinders rehabilitation and reduces the effects of rehabilitation work [13].

Taking into account the above aspects, it is more often recommended to protect individuals not participating in the prison subculture, so that the interactions towards them were limited to neutralizing and protecting against the negative influences of prison isolation. Rehabilitation would protect against criminogenic influences from convicted prisoners, serving an anti-negative correctional function [1, p.429].

Hence, there is a need for interaction with persons undergoing imprisonment towards the development of empathy, understood as a theoretical construction system, relating to one person's reaction to the experience of other people, located in the affective-cognitive dimension. It consists of: empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress expressed as an order [6, p. 70].

Studies by A. Szymanowska [15, p 186], carried out on a group of repeat offenders prison, showed that for the most part they are encountering problems with experiencing guilt, the ability to feel empathy and self-criticism. Research conducted by A. Węgliński showed that the level of empathy among young offenders is significantly lower in comparison to their non-criminal peers [16, p.319].

Using elements of culture to achieve educational effects (cultural technique by Cz. Czapówa and St. Jedlewski) [5], it has been proposed that prisoners participate in an original programme, including elements of drama and activity in a community theatre. The creative expressiveness, as a manifested need to create, combined with the ability to have creative activities was to allow an individual to express their mental state and overcome the destructive influence of belonging to the subculture. As part of the educational intervention, taking into account the natural desire to gain social approval, the convicted were proposed cultural patterns of the same category as previously created, but allowing to express more constructive functions. Through the use of elements of drama, the assumption was to show the inmates how to understand themselves and others so that, in the future, the benefits of participation in the interaction could be mutual.

Methodological issues

The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the development of empathy among members of a criminal subculture.

The research problem is contained in the question: To what extent it is possible to effectively develop empathy among convicted persons?

The following specific questions were formulated to the research problem:

1. What level of emotional-cognitive empathy characterizes a person convicted of various offenses in respect of: fantasy, reception of the point of view of others, empathic response in difficult situations, empathic response to the negative experiences of others?

2. To what extent carrying out awareness-raising activities contributes to the development of empathy among convicted persons?

Based on the professional literature, it has been assumed that the sensitizing activities contribute to a significant increase in the level of cognitive empathy and an increase of empathic sensitivity among convicted persons [2, 17.10].

The study methods employed for this study were a diagnostic survey with the questionnaire technique. In The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by M. Davis was used as a research tool as adapted by A. Lewicka.

The study was carried out twice. The first measure of empathy was in April 2012, and again, after the 15-hour empathy training, in June 2012. The conducted research explorations should be considered as a pilot study as they are being continued with other groups of convicts.

The primary group were detainees of the Detention Centre in Lublin. Research on the comparison groups was carried out in the Penitentiary Institution in Warsaw Białoleka, after attempting to assign them to the primary group in terms of age, gender, place of residence and education. The variable that diversified the groups was the kind of criminal offense: control group 1 - convicted of theft, control group 2 - convicted of abuse and control group 3 - convicted of murder,

Age of the subjects was in the range 20-65 years of age, however, most were between 25 and 30 years of age. 87% of prisoners came from the cities, and most ended their education at the vocational and secondary level (56% and 34% respectively).

Case study result analysis.

First, a comparison was made of the results obtained by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index from the convicts in the primary group, with the results of the comparison groups. The results are presented in the three consecutive tables (1,2,3).

The first comparison group was comprised of persons convicted under article 278 of the penal code (Table 1).

Table 1. Examined convicteds relating to the comparative group (sentenced for theft)

Scales	Group	M	SD	t	p
Fantasy (scale I)	basic	10,33	4,18	0,710	n.i.
	comparative 1	8,77	5,06		
Empathy reacting in difficult situations (scale II)	basic	11,22	5,01	0,391	n.i.
	comparative 1	14,77	4,12		
Empathy reply to negative experiences other (scale III)	basic	8,33	3,53	-0,613	n.i.
	comparative 1	4,66	3,20		
Adopting a point of view other (scale IV)	basic	15,88	2,84	1,241	n.i.
	comparative 1	14,56	3,24		
Emotional-cognitive empathy (EEP)	basic	45,77	9,75	0,714	n.i.
	comparative 1	41,55	14,80		

As the results show, convicts of the primary and comparative groups did not differ significantly in their empathy. Small discrepancies in the average results are in the vast majority in favour of the participants of empathy training. Only in scale II, did the convicted of theft prove to be a bit more empathetic in response to difficult situations. The result is not surprising in the context of the type of offense committed by the convicts of the primary group. The vast majority of them committed crimes of a similar nature to those in the control group. Hence, it was to be expected that their level of empathy would be similar.

The second comparison group was comprised of persons convicted under article 207 of the penal code (Table 2).

Table 2. Examined convicteds relating to the comparative group (of convicteds too cruelty)

Scales	Group	M	SD	t	p
Fantasy (scale I)	basic	10,33	4,18	-0,120	n.i.
	comparative 2	10,55	3,64		
Empathy reacting in difficult situations (scale II)	basic	11,22	5,01	-1,643	n.i.
	comparative 2	10,33	4,60		
Empathy reply to negative experiences other (scale III)	basic	8,33	3,53	2,306	0,035*
	comparative 2	9,44	4,12		
Adopting a point of view other (scale IV)	basic	15,88	2,84	0,927	n.i.
	comparative 2	12,55	7,53		
Emotional-cognitive empathy (EEP)	basic	45,77	9,75	0,288	n.i.
	comparative 2	44,55	8,16		

* $p < 0,05$

The people from the control group, convicted of abuse, were definitely able to empathize more strongly with others experiencing negative emotions ($p < 0,05$). The result may seem absurd in light of the type of crime they committed. It seems that people who compassionate with others their unpleasant emotions will not contribute to the formation of such emotions. However, according to M. Davis too high a level of the empathic arousal in the offender increases aggression [6]. In other IRI scales there were no significant differences in empathy in the compared groups.

The last comparison group was comprised of people convicted of murder and assault resulting in death (Article 148 of the penal code and article 158 of the penal code) (Table 3).

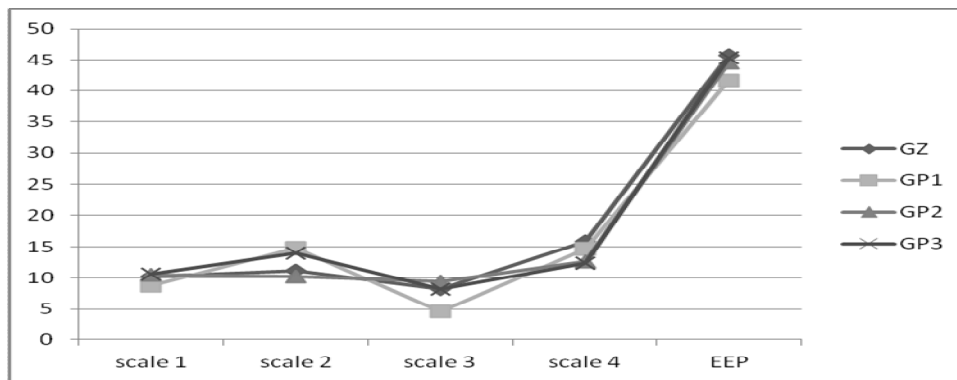
Table 3. Examined convicteds relating to the comparative group (sentenced for murder)

Scales	Group	M	SD	t	p
Fantasy (scale I)	basic	10,33	4,18	-0,171	n.i.
	comparative 3	10,66	4,06		
Empathy reacting in difficult situations (scale II)	basic	11,22	5,01	-1,385	n.i.
	comparative 3	14,00	3,32		
Empathy reply to negative experiences other (scale III)	basic	8,33	3,53	0,059	n.i.
	comparative 3	8,22	4,35		
Adopting a point of view other (scale IV)	basic	15,88	2,84	2,002	0,05*
	comparative 3	12,44	4,30		
Emotional-cognitive empathy (EEP)	basic	45,77	9,75	0,092	n.i.
	comparative 3	45,33	10,81		

* $p < 0,05$

The convicts who became part of the primary group are to a much greater extent able to empathize with others on the cognitive level than those convicted of murder ($p < 0,05$). The result confirms, as it were, that people at lower stages of social derailment have no such empathy deficits as those who commit the most severe crimes. Deficiencies in empathy are characteristic of psychopaths [12.3]. One cannot rule out the possibility there are no people with personality disordered structure among the murderers.

Figure 1 presents the mean scores of empathy for all compared groups.



Graph 1. Empathyness of comparative groups sentenced from the fundamental group against the background (M)

In general, the convicts are characterized by an average level of emotional and cognitive empathy. The results obtained in the different dimensions of empathy did not differ significantly. It can, therefore, be concluded that the test subjects selected for the awareness-raising activities are a representative sample of convicts in terms of empathy.

Answering the basic question about the effectiveness of developing empathy among convicted persons was possible thanks to the student's t-test. Although there were no statistically significant differences in the general IRI results between measurement I and II, the changes are visible in the specific dimensions of the emotional-cognitive empathy (Table 4).

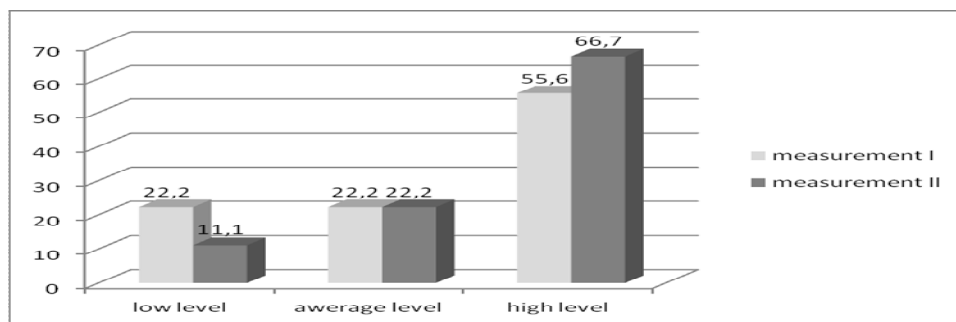
Table 4 Statistically significant changes in the empathy of the criminals from the primary group.

Items/IRI scale	Group	M	SD	t	p
I really empathize with the experiences of book characters. (question. 2)	measurement I	2,11	1,36	2,10	0,060
	measurement II	3,00	1,24		
In difficult situations I feel anxious and lost. (question. 3)	measurement I	2,67	1,11	2,68	0,028*
	measurement II	1,66	1,36		
I believe there are two sides to everything and I try to take both into account. (question. 14)	measurement I	2,78	0,83	3,50	0,008**
	measurement II	3,55	0,72		
I tend to lose control over myself in difficult situations. (question. 17)	measurement I	2,33	1,30	2,62	0,030*
	measurement II	1,22	1,12		
Empathic reaction in difficult situations. (scale 2)	measurement I	11,22	5,02	2,73	0,026*
	measurement II	15,89	3,95		

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$

The convicts, after sensitizing activities, said that in conflict situations they attach more attention to the views and needs of the other side ($p < 0.01$). In difficult situations they can control their emotions more often (< 0.05). It is a little easier for them to empathize with the experiences literary characters ($p = 0.06$). Thanks to these individual changes they started to behave significantly more empathically in difficult situations ($p < 0.05$), which may prevent future conflicts (also legal).

The hypothesis assumes that awareness-raising activities contribute to a significant increase in the level of empathy among the participants. The results shown in Figure 2, however, do not support it. An encouraging fact is that progressively fewer and fewer convicts are showing empathy deficits that may indicate psychopathy [14].



Chi-kwadrat=4,707; df=2; p<0,09

Graph 2. Level of the empathy of persons of convicteds (measurement I-II)

Conclusions and future prospects

In light of the findings of this study, it appears advisable to conduct cultural technique activities in prisons (especially in the group of prisoners of article 148 of penal code and article 158 of penal code). They can contribute to an increase in the level of empathy among the convicts, and hence, bring the members of the criminal subculture to other members of society in terms of similar sensitivity to other people.

The development of empathy is a lifelong process, so the sooner the sensitizing interactions are started, the more lasting and greater will be the changes in personality. Comprehensive development of empathy should proceed in the family, as well as in correctional institutions, with the participation of the public and professionals (teachers, psychologists, artists). The optimal environment for the development of empathy is one which provides an individual with a sense of security and understanding. Acceptance by society promotes the growth of self-esteem, which, in turn, leads to expressing their own experiences freely and perceiving other people's experiences (A. Lewicka, 2006, p. 83-84). Using cultural technique activities with elements of drama allows convicts to work on their own emotions in a different form than previously realized. Active participation in these activities and their completion will contribute to the development of pro-social behaviour in the participants, increasing their chances of subsequent readaptation and social reintegration.

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